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TRUANCY REPORT FOR THE 1994-95 SCHOOL YEAR



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
JANUARY - 1996

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TRUANCY REPORT FOR THE 1994-95 SCHOOL YEAR

State of Iowa
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Grimes State Office Building
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

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PURPOSE

TRUANCY PANEL REPORT

Senate File 266, the FY 96 education appropriation bill, requires the Department of Education to conduct a study of Iowa Code chapter 299, the compulsory education law, in cooperation with interested individuals from throughout the state. The department is required to submit a report of the findings and recommendations to the general assembly.

This truancy study has two parts. The first part consists of a summary of the activities of a truancy panel convened by the department and a list of the panel's recommendations. There was no attempt to reach a majority consensus on the recommendations as panel members felt that the final arbitrator of the validity and viability of the recommendations is the legislature. The second part of the study outlines the results of the department's district-by-district truancy survey.

SUMMARY

In October 1995, the department convened an eighteen member truancy panel which consisted of rural and urban school administrators, teachers, truancy officers, students, parents and representatives from the juvenile court system and county attorney's office. The panel discussed the variety of tailor-made truancy programs at work around the state and developed five programming and nine statutory recommendations. Many of the recommendations center around the need for coordination and integration of efforts and the need for meaningful consequences for truants.

Based on information collected from 375 of 384 public school districts and from 196 of 206 nonpublic schools a total of three percent of public school students and 1.2 percent of nonpublic school students were reported as truant during the 1994-95 school year.

Of the 15,196 public school truants and the 520 nonpublic school truants reported in 1994-95, the majority were white males from large schools and school districts. More than 56 percent of public school truant students attended districts with enrollments of more than 7500. The majority of truant students in public as well as nonpublic schools were from grades 9-12.

The primary reasons for student trancies were reported as being due to behavior problems and home and family circumstances. Nearly three times more reasons for trancies in public schools were classified as unknown (40%) than for nonpublic schools (14%).

BACKGROUND

IOWA'S TRUANCY LAW

Iowa Code chapter 299 is Iowa's truancy law. The first notable feature of the law is that students ages 6 to 16 are deemed of compulsory age and are required by law to attend school. Students aged 17 and 18 cannot be prosecuted for truancy under current Iowa law. Iowa law also requires school districts to appoint a truancy officer or, at minimum, designate a person to collect information on the numbers of truants in the districts.

Iowa Code section 299.8 allows local discretion in defining truancy. Specifically, truancy is defined according to the local school board's or school governing body's attendance policy. As such, the definition of truancy varies from district to district.

If a student is in violation of an attendance policy, the school district must first attempt to find the cause of a child's absence and use every means available to the school to assure that the child does attend. If these efforts fail, the school district must refer the matter to the county attorney for mediation. The school district is responsible to monitor any resulting mediation agreement reached among students, school officials, and the student's parents or guardian. If mediation fails, the student may be referred to juvenile court for further action.

Violation of the mediation agreement can result in simple misdemeanor charge against the parent or guardian for a first violation of the agreement. Second and subsequent violations are serious misdemeanors. In lieu of a fine and/or imprisonment, the court may order the parent or guardian to perform community service. There is no statutory penalty available under which to prosecute students.

TRUANCY PANEL REPORT

TRUANCY PANEL

In October 1995, the department convened an eighteen member truancy panel which consisted of rural and urban school administrators, teachers, truancy officers, students, parents, and representatives from the juvenile court system and a county attorney's office. (See appendix A for a list of the panel members). The panel accomplished three tasks. They identified factors that contribute to truancy, identified components of effective truancy prevention programs and made a series of statutory and policy recommendations. A questionnaire was mailed to each panel member in an effort to solicit additional input on how to improve Iowa's truancy law.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO TRUANCY

The panel members identified the following factors as contributing to truancy:

- Inadequate human service and education resources to meet the needs of at-risk students;
- Home/family circumstances;
- Lack of a meaningful consequence for students who don't attend classes;
- Stress from class assignments and other homework activities;
- Peer pressure;
- Lack of transportation;
- Inconsistency of involvement by county attorneys in prosecuting truants;
- Inadequate juvenile court resources;
- Difficulty in securing available funding for truancy officers.

COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE TRUANCY PREVENTION PROGRAMS

The diverse make-up of the panel enabled members to share the variety of successful efforts they are undertaking in their home districts. Most school districts represented had some form of alternative high school. One district had successfully implemented a school-within-a-school program that allows truants to stay within their home school environment while participating in make-up, disciplinary or prevention programs. Other districts have or are forming partnerships to establish a separate alternative school campus.

Nine of the ten school districts represented on the panel have truancy officers. One emerging trend in smaller districts is the pooling of resources to either hire one truancy officer to serve the participating districts or buy the part-time service of a truancy officer who also serves as local probation officer or juvenile court officer. Community based partnerships are forming among schools, law enforcement, the juvenile court system and social service providers to deal with the total needs of at-risk students, of which truancy is a likely characteristic. In addition, some form of school-based intervention programming is in place in most districts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are a compilation of items discussed at the October, 1995 meeting and the result of a survey sent to panel members in December, 1995. The recommendations are based on the panel's identification and unanimous adoption of the premise that existing efforts are not meeting the increasingly complex needs to today's students.

Several panel members prefaced their suggested recommendations with a cautionary note that legislative intervention in the form of purely statutory change could upset the individualization and collaborative efforts of programs that are currently being developed.

PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide state level coordination of community partnerships and assistance in developing community partnerships among school districts, law enforcement, social service providers, juvenile court, parents and students;
- Promote interagency collaboration of resources for at-risk programs and provide centralized guidance at the state level on the various sources of available state and federal at-risk funding;
- Expand pre-school and elementary at-risk prevention and parent programs;
- Integrate truancy prevention and disciplinary programs into middle schools. Most existing programs are primarily geared toward high school students;

RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO IOWA LAW

- Maintain local school district discretion in defining truancy;
- Amend Iowa Code section 299.5A to **require** referral to juvenile court when truancy mediation breaks down without an agreement being reached. Currently, the mediator **may** refer the matter to juvenile court.
- Enforce existing misdemeanor penalties against parents who violate truancy mediation agreements.
- Enact legislation and provide adequate resources to require county attorneys to prosecute truants who fail to comply with mediation agreements. Currently, prosecution occurs at the discretion of the county attorney and is often based on the work load and resources of the particular county attorney's office.
- Enact legislation and provide adequate resources requiring school districts to provide alternative educational services for truants and students who have been expelled from school.
- Enact a meaningful statutory penalty to be imposed on all students for failing to attend school. Suggested penalties included community service, a monetary fine similar to the scheduled fine of \$25 for minors for possession of tobacco products, or juvenile detention for chronic truants. Since the 1994 enactment of the law requiring revocation of a truant's drivers license, only 136 licenses have actually been revoked. During the 1994-95 school year, however, nearly 5,000 students of driving age were truant. The small number of revocations can be attributed in part to the various exceptions provided in section 299.1B;
- Enact legislation that prohibits adults from harboring truants during the school day and from harboring runaways;

- Give school officers the discretion to immediately refer truancy cases to the county attorney's office for mediation. Current law allows for a referral to mediation only after school officers attempt to find the cause of the child's absence and are unsuccessful in using every means available to the school to assure that the child does attend. There are cases where this required first step proves to be time consuming and delays necessary intervention;
- Provide penalties for employers who employ students during school hours. Provide exceptions for students who are involved in school sponsored or school endorsed apprenticeship programs.

TRUANCY DATA REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The following information is based on data collected from public school districts and from nonpublic schools for the 1994-95 school year. Data contained herein reflects analyses of 375 of 384 public school districts, 97.7 percent of the total districts, and 196 of 206 nonpublic schools or 95.1 percent. The data provided in this report reflects the number of students classified by districts and by nonpublic schools as truant. It does not reflect the total number of trancies that occurred.

The number of students identified as truant are reported in terms of enrollment category, racial/ethnic group, grade level, gender, and by primary reason for truancy. (See appendix B for Truancy Form).

PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Of the 375 public school districts included in this analysis 143 districts or 38.1 percent reported having no students truant. The maximum number of truant students reported by public school districts was 2,330. Most of the truant students were from districts with enrollments of 7,500 or more students. The average number of truant students was 41 and the median was two.

Statewide a total of 15,196 students were reported by public school districts as being truant at least one time. The total number of truant students represented three percent of the public school enrollment of 500,592.

ENROLLMENT CATEGORY

Table 1 depicts the number of truant students by enrollment category. Of the more than 15,000 students reported as truant, more than 56 percent were from districts with enrollments of 7,500 and above. Districts in this enrollment category also had a higher percentage of total students who were truant, 6.5 percent, than the state average of three percent.

TABLE 1

NUMBER AND PERCENT OF PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS TRUANT BY ENROLLMENT CATEGORY 1994-95					
Enrollment Category	Total Number Truant Students	Average Number of Students Truant	% of Total Students Truant in Category	% of All Students Truant	% of Total Enrollment in Category
<250	15	.6	.3	.1	1.1
250-399	185	3.8	1.1	1.2	3.4
400-599	291	3.5	.7	1.9	8.3
600-999	996	9.2	1.2	6.6	16.5
1,000-2,499	2,765	33.7	2.2	18.2	25.5
2,500-7,499	2,370	112.9	2.5	15.6	19.0
7,500+	8,574	952.7	6.5	56.4	26.2
Total	15,196	40.5	3.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Iowa Department of Education
Basic Educational Data Survey, Truancy File, 1994-95

Districts under 1,000 enrollment accounted for under 10 percent of all truant students reported. Generally, the percentage of students who were truant increased with increases in enrollment categories. The average number of truant students ranged from less than one student in the smallest enrollment category to more than 950 students in the largest districts.

GRADE LEVEL

Table 2 reflects the number of truant students by grade level. Students at all grade levels including kindergarten were reported as truant. Less than 10 percent of truant students were reported in grades K-4, 20.5 percent in grades 5-8 and nearly 70 percent in grades 9-12.

TABLE 2

NUMBER AND PERCENT OF PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS TRUANT BY GRADE LEVEL 1994-95		
Grade Level	Number	Percent
K	282	1.9
1	326	2.1
2	310	2.0
3	304	2.0
4	291	1.9
5	340	2.2
6	473	3.1
7	990	6.5
8	1,327	8.7
9	2,872	19.0
10	2,702	17.8
11	2,554	16.8
12	2,425	16.0
Total	15,196	100.0

Source: Iowa Department of Education
Basic Educational Data Survey, Truancy File, 1994-95

The distribution of truant students within grade level by enrollment category is reflected in Table 3. As was true with grade level figures at the state level, the highest percentage of students reported as truant were in grades 9-12 across all enrollment categories. The percentage of truant students at the various grade levels reflected no particular pattern across enrollment categories.

TABLE 3

PERCENT OF PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS TRUANT BY GRADE LEVEL WITHIN ENROLLMENT CATEGORY 1994-95							
Grade Level	Enrollment Category						
	<250	250-399	400-599	600-999	1,000-2,499	2,499-7,499	7,500+
K	0	3.8	0	1.9	.4	1.5	2.5
1	0	5.9	0	2.2	.5	1.2	2.9
2	6.7	2.2	.7	1.7	.3	.7	3.1
3	0	2.2	0	2.0	.2	.9	2.9
4	6.7	4.9	1.0	.6	.3	.6	2.8
5	0	4.3	0	2.7	.5	1.6	2.9
6	0	5.4	0	2.9	1.2	3.1	3.8
7	0	8.6	4.8	2.7	2.9	9.5	7.3
8	6.7	4.9	7.2	8.1	6.7	12.4	8.6
9	20.0	14.6	18.6	15.4	21.6	17.2	19.0
10	33.3	15.1	22.3	17.8	24.2	18.1	15.5
11	13.3	16.2	25.5	19.6	22.1	19.0	13.9
12	13.3	11.9	19.9	1.4	19.1	14.1	14.8

Source: Iowa Department of Education
Basic Educational Data Survey, Truancy File, 1994-95

RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUPS

Information on truant students was also collected by racial/ethnic category and is reported in Tables 4 and 5. Table 4 contains information on truant students for the state as a whole and reflects totals for each of the five racial/ethnic groups. Minority groups accounted for 16.3 percent of all truant students while representing 6.9 percent of the public school population. The majority students accounted for 83.7 percent of all truant students and represented 93.2 percent of the student population in the public schools.

In relation to the percent of the student population they represent, African American students reflected the highest truancy count with 1,419 or 9.3 percent of all truant students.

TABLE 4

NUMBER AND PERCENT OF PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS TRUANT BY RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUP 1994-95			
Racial/ Ethnic Group	Number Students Truant	% of All Truant Students	% of Total Students in Racial/Ethnic Group
American Indian	196	1.3	.4
Hispanic	555	3.7	1.8
Asian	299	2.0	1.5
African American	1,419	9.3	3.2
White	12,727	83.7	93.1
Total	15,196	100	100

Source: Iowa Department of Education
Basic Educational Data Survey, Truancy File, 1994-95

TABLE 5

PERCENT OF PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS TRUANT BY RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUP WITHIN ENROLLMENT CATEGORY 1994-95							
Racial/Ethnic Group	Enrollment Category						
	<250	250- 399	400- 599	600- 999	1,000- 2,499	2,499- 7,499	7,500+
American Indian	0	0	1.0	.1	.4	.1	2.1
Hispanic	0	5.4	1.4	1.6	1.8	3.8	4.5
Asian	0	0	.3	.4	1.0	13.5	2.9
African American	0	0	1.0	.7	.5	3.1	15.4
White	100	94.6	96.3	97.2	96.3	92.5	75.1

Source: Iowa Department of Education
Basic Educational Data Survey, Truancy File, 1994-95

GENDER

The count of truant students by gender is reported in Table 6. Data suggest that males are more likely to be truant than females. For districts under 400 enrollment and for districts with enrollments of 600-2499 truant males outnumbered females two to one. For districts with enrollments of 2,500 or more the percentage point difference between males and females was about 10.

TABLE 6

NUMBER AND PERCENT OF PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS TRUANT BY GENDER WITHIN ENROLLMENT CATEGORY 1994-95				
Enrollment Category	(Distribution of Truant Students)			
	Male		Female	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<250	10	66.7	5	33.3
250-399	119	64.3	65	35.7
400-599	162	55.7	129	44.3
600-999	640	64.3	356	35.7
1,000-2,499	1,736	62.8	1,029	37.2
2,500-7,499	1,296	54.7	1,074	45.3
7,500+	4,714	55.0	3,860	45.0
Total¹	8,677	57.1	6,818	42.9

Source: Iowa Department of Education

Basic Educational Data Survey, Truancy File, 1994-95

¹One student was not reported by gender

REASON FOR TRUANCY

Estimated numbers of students who were truant by reason for truancy are reported in Tables 7 and 8. Districts were requested to determine the primary reason for truancy and estimate the percentage of students in each of seven reason categories. The categories included: 1) academic difficulties; 2) pregnancy; 3) behavior problems; 4) marriage; 5) home/family circumstances; 6) relationships at school; and 7) unknown.

The category of 'unknown' represented the largest portion of responses with 40.9 percent. Behavior problems and home/family circumstances accounted for nearly 49 percent of reasons for student truancy. The remaining categories of academic difficulty, relationships at school, pregnancy, and marriage accounted for 5.2 percent, 4.2 percent, .6 percent, and .2 percent respectively.

TABLE 7

ESTIMATED NUMBER AND PERCENT OF PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS TRUANT BY REASON 1994-95		
Reason Truant	Number	Percent
Academic Difficulty	787	5.2
Pregnancy	98	.6
Behavior Problems	3,938	25.9
Marriage	34	.2
Home/Family Circumstances	3,501	23.0
Relationships at School	631	4.2
Unknown	6,207	40.9
Total	15,196	100

Source: Iowa Department of Education

Basic Educational Data Survey, Truancy File, 1994-95

Table 8, which reflects reasons for truancy, demonstrates that the largest percentage of 'unknown' responses are attributed to districts in the largest enrollment category.

TABLE 8

**ESTIMATED PERCENT OF PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS TRUANT BY
BY REASON WITHIN ENROLLMENT CATEGORY 1994-95**

Reason Truant	Enrollment Category						
	<250	250-399	400-599	600-999	1,000-2,499	2,499-7,499	7,500+
Academic Difficulty	0	.4	.8	5.5	35.5	30.5	27.4
Pregnancy	2.0	2.0	9.0	8.0	22.0	16.0	39.0
Behavior Problems	0	1.8	2.7	6.3	29.2	18.3	41.7
Marriage	0	0	0	0	47.1	52.9	0
Home/Family Circum.	2.1	1.9	3.0	10.1	14.6	20.8	49.7
Relationships at School	0	2.5	1.9	4.4	32.3	20.0	38.9
Unknown	.2	.5	.9	5.1	9.5	8.4	75.6

Source: Iowa Department of Education
Basic Educational Data Survey, Truancy File, 1994-95

NONPUBLIC SCHOOLS

A total of 196 nonpublic school surveys are included in this analysis out of a possible 206, 95.1 percent of total nonpublic schools. Of the 44,752 students attending nonpublic schools during the 1994-95 school year, 520 or 1.2 percent were reported as having been truant, compared to three percent for public schools.

GRADE LEVEL

In terms of the distribution of students reported as truant by grade level, Table 9 depicts that the large majority of student trancies occurred in grades 9-12, 82.9 percent. Like the distribution of truant students in the public schools, less than 10 percent of the students who were truant were in grades K-4. Truant students were also reported for each grade level including kindergarten.

TABLE 9

**NUMBER AND PERCENT OF NONPUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS TRUANT
BY GRADE LEVEL 1994-95**

Grade Level	Number	Percent
K	7	1.3
1	8	1.5
2	10	1.9
3	8	1.5
4	9	1.7
5	12	2.3
6	13	2.5
7	13	2.5
8	10	1.9
9	62	11.9
10	114	22.0
11	145	28.2
12	108	20.8
Total	520	100.0

Source: Iowa Department of Education
Basic Educational Data Survey, Truancy File, 1994-95

RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUPS

Table 10 reports nonpublic students by racial/ethnic group. Minority students accounted for 8.9 percent of all students who were truant. The minority student enrollment in nonpublic schools represents 3.4 percent of all students in nonpublic schools. The percentage of minority students reported as truant is more than 2.5 times greater than their representation in the nonpublic school population. Within the minority category, Hispanic students represented the highest percentage of truant students at 4.4 percent followed by African American students at 3.3 percent.

TABLE 10

**NUMBER AND PERCENT OF NONPUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS TRUANT
BY RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUP 1994-95**

Racial/ Ethnic Group	Number Students Truant	% of All Truant Students	% of Total Enrollment
American Indian	2	.4	.1
Hispanic	23	4.4	1.5
Asian	4	.8	.9
African American	18	3.3	.9
White	473	91.1	96.6
Total	520	100.0	100.0

Source: Iowa Department of Education
Basic Educational Data Survey, Truancy File, 1994-95

GENDER

Table 11 reflects that as with public school students, a higher percentage of males were truant than females.

TABLE 11

**NUMBER AND PERCENT OF NONPUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS TRUANT
BY GENDER WITHIN ENROLLMENT CATEGORY 1994-95**

Distribution of Truant Students					
Male			Female		
Number	Percent		Number	Percent	
306	59		214	41.0	

Source: Iowa Department of Education
Basic Educational Data Survey, Truancy File, 1994-95

REASON FOR TRUANCY

Reasons for nonpublic student truancy are reported in Table 12. Behavior problems accounted for more than 55 percent of truants in nonpublic schools, more than two times greater than the public school figure. Only about 14 percent of nonpublic truants were reported as reason 'unknown' compared to over 40 percent in public schools. All other categories of reasons for truancy were quite similar to the public school pattern.

TABLE 12

**ESTIMATED NUMBER AND PERCENT OF NONPUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS TRUANT
BY REASON 1994-95**

Reason Truant	Number	Percent
Academic Difficulty	21	4.0
Pregnancy	1	.2
Behavior Problems	287	55.3
Marriage	0	0
Home/Family Circumstances	125	23.9
Relationships at School	13	2.5
Unknown	73	14.1
Total	520	100

Source: Iowa Department of Education
Basic Educational Data Survey, Truancy File, 1994-95

APPENDIX A

TRUANCY PANEL

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APPENDIX B

State of Iowa
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Bureau of Planning, Research and Evaluation
Grimes State Office Building
Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0146

Date Due October 2, 1995

Truancy Summary Report for 1994-95 School Year

School Name _____ Person Completing Form _____

County No. & District No. _____ Phone Number _____

Directions: This is a count of the number of students who were truant during the 1994-95 school year **NOT** the number of trancies. Count each truant student only once regardless of the number of times the student was truant.

Chapter 299.8 "Truant" defined. Any child of compulsory attendance age who fails to attend school as provided in this chapter, or as required by the school board's or school governing body's attendance policy, or who fails to attend competent private instruction under chapter 299A, without reasonable excuse for the absence, shall be deemed to be a truant, [S13, §2823-3; C24, 27, 31, 35, 39, §4417; C46, 50, 54, 58, 62, 66, 71, 73, 75, 77, 79, 81, §299.8] 81 Acts, ch 200, 11.

_____ Check here if NO students were truant.

Number of Students Truant by Racial/Ethnicity Categories & Gender

Total	Category	Number of Male	Number of Female
_____	White, not of Hispanic origin	_____	_____
_____	Black, not of Hispanic origin	_____	_____
_____	Asian or Pacific Islander	_____	_____
_____	Hispanic	_____	_____
_____	American Indian or Alaskan Native	_____	_____
_____	GRAND TOTAL	_____	_____

Total Number of Students Truant by Grade Level

_____	Kindergarten	_____	Grade 7
_____	Grade 1	_____	Grade 8
_____	Grade 2	_____	Grade 9
_____	Grade 3	_____	Grade 10
_____	Grade 4	_____	Grade 11
_____	Grade 5	_____	Grade 12
_____	Grade 6	_____	GRAND TOTAL

(This GRAND TOTAL should match the GRAND TOTAL above.)

Reasons for Truancies

First, for each truant student determine the single, primary reason for the truancy or truancies. Finally, determine the percentage of students who were truant primarily due to each reason listed below. The total percentages should add to 100.

_____ %	Academic Difficulties	_____ %	Marriage
_____ %	Pregnancy	_____ %	Home/Family Circumstances
_____ %	Behavior Problems	_____ %	Relationships at School (student-staff, student-student)
_____ %	Unknown		
	100%		TOTAL

Please contact Coleen McClanahan (515-281-7509) with questions regarding this form.